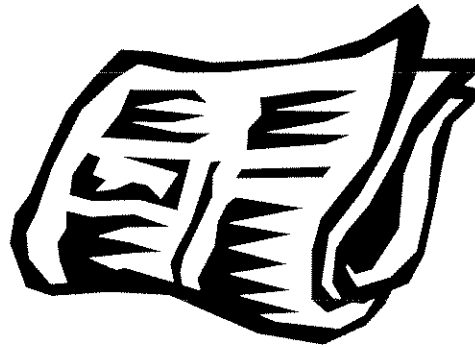


# **Your Local Union Newsletter**

***Building solidarity and political  
awareness  
through communication***



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# Your Local Union Newsletter

## Contents

*“...the lives of 100 million working people--those who make the US economy and society run--are being routinely ignored, marginalized or inaccurately portrayed in the media.”*

*Jonathan Tasini, 1990 report for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting.*

Why have a union newsletter? .....	1
The nuts and bolts of a local union newsletter.....	2
Newsletter content: What must go in .....	3
How do you get stories or articles? .....	5
The local union newsletter: What to write about.....	7
Getting people to read your newsletter: Easy tips for layout.....	12

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# WHY HAVE A UNION NEWSLETTER?<sup>1</sup>

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- ➡ **Few members attend union meetings** to get exposure to the union and its concerns because other sources are competing for members' time and attention.
- ➡ **Employers are making a more intimate pitch to employees.** The union has to compete with the employer to appeal to employees and show members how the union is serving them.
- ➡ **New technology is changing the pattern of work and life.** The union must keep members informed of what it is doing to meet changing conditions.
- ➡ **Issues are more complicated.** Seniority, severance pay pensions, health plans, incentive rates, job classifications, safety regulations, and other factors of life on the job can be complex matters. Members can't depend on word-of-mouth or bulletin boards to understand issues and digest important background information.
- ➡ **Prosecution of grievances** is one of the greatest protections a union can give its members. Many grievances are so complex that union members seldom understand what is involved merely through listening to the grapevine. If left to the grapevine, personalities may obscure the real significance of the issue to the whole membership.
- ➡ **Labor law** imposes obligations on unions and union officers to channel to members official publication of union reports, notification to members of official actions, and the reporting of elections.
- ➡ **Regular contact with the community** to let the public know what the union is doing can be accomplished through special newsletter mailings to community leaders and media.
- ➡ **Publications are a powerful tool** for building a strong union. They let the membership know that the union is involved in a host of activities in addition to grievance handling and collective bargaining. They create a strong sense of "who we are" and foster the union values of sticking up for each other in tough times.
- ➡ **A newspaper or newsletter provides detailed stories** that can be read at leisure and rechecked later to confirm a fact. Because it's generally sent or taken to the member's home, it may get read by family, friends, and neighbors--which helps to spread a union message throughout the community.
- ➡ **Most important of all**, an attractive, lively, readable local union publication is a continuing line of communication to all the members. It strengthens the local's position as a "familiar friend." "Merely by publishing a newsletter, a local apparently accomplishes a 24% shift in turning negative feelings into positive member support for (...) the local union."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a CWA Public Relations Manual

<sup>2</sup> CWA president Morton Bahr, commenting on results of a nationwide telephone survey conducted by Lake Research for Communications Workers of America, February 1996, on local union newsletters.

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# THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF A LOCAL UNION NEWSLETTER

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- **The newsletter budget**

## Cost items

**How big?** You must decide right off on the size of your newsletter. It can range from a single page, to front and back, to a multi-page format. You may want to start small, but you will soon find that you have lots of material to include and should leave yourself the option of expanding.

**How often?** Frequency can range from once every two weeks to once or twice a year. Many locals aim at monthly or quarterly publication dates. Obviously costs rise with frequency.

## **Printing**

Where? Local is better, and getting to know your printer is essential.

Union bug? Make every effort to locate and use printing companies with unionized workforces. Remember that you must tell the printer that you want the union bug and indicate where on the publication you wish it to appear.

## **Distribution**

Decide:

> mail to homes? If you choose this preferred option, costs can be considerable. Look into the following cost cutting measures.

--bulk mail permit. If you mail to more than 200 people, this is worth getting.

--self mailer? Perhaps you can format your newsletter to accomodate a blank area with address and return address

--mailing labels?

--envelopes?

> distribute at work? This is much cheaper, obviously, but has its limitations, especially if workers are spread out, rather than at a single location.

- **Equipment you will need**

>For a cut and paste effort, scissors, glue and imagination

>For a more sophisticated look: a computer with word processing and laser printer, desk top publishing, copier with capability to alter the size of copies so you can enlarge and shrink photos and graphics.

>For professional printing--guidelines to tell them what you want. Talk to the printer and get help with the equipment you will need to make the instructions clear.

- **Staff to help you**

**Skills:** Try to recruit people with this combination of skills: writing, editing, design, computer, time to help with folding, stuffing, distributing. Often, the more small tasks you can get people to do, the more members will feel a sense of ownership and interest in the newsletter. Even in very large locals, sometimes just one person does all this successfully.

**Networking and schooling:** Remember to provide educational opportunities to the people who work on the newsletter. Many international unions have newsletter conferences, editor's organizations or self-help groups and publications designed to help out. The University of Iowa runs an annual "labor press" conference which usually combines classes on issues and workshops on specific skills. The Iowa State Labor Press Association brings together newsletter editors from unions across the state in a network of people who share newsletters, ideas and articles.

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# **NEWSLETTER CONTENT: WHAT *MUST* GO IN? WHAT *SHOULD* GO IN?**

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The following are the bare bones minimum of what must go in the newsletter:

- next meeting--time and date: what will happen
- last meeting--what happened
- who are our officers and how to reach them
- local union election information: candidates, voting information

## What should go in the newsletter follows from the mission of the labor press.

### The mission of the Labor Press<sup>3</sup>

- ✍ to inform members of events in their local union, their community, and their larger political environment
- ✍ to present an alternative source of information tailored to the needs and interests of working people
- ✍ to build the solidarity of the local union
- ✍ to educate and mobilize members around labor's political issues and agendas

### ●Prioritizing--you can't get everything in!

Of this list of items from a simulated local newsletter, which do you feel are most appropriate, if it is to fulfill the mission of the labor press?

- |                          |   |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | What happened at last meeting                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | Family thank you's for cards and flowers for deceased members     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Grievance report                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Editorial comment   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Article on tax fairness                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Report from City Federation of Labor                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | NAFTA report                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Steward of the month  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Advertisements from local businesses              | <input type="checkbox"/> | Meet new members  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Report from delegates to national convention      | <input type="checkbox"/> | List of "potential members"                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Dues increase notice                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | Report from union members of labor-management cooperation program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Message from the union president                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Interview with one or more members on a political issue           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Holiday greetings                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Letters from members  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Invitation to union social event                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Report on pre-bargaining survey                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Come to our next meeting                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | "For sale by members" list of garage sales, used cars, etc.       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | List of officers' names and phone numbers         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Report on City Council meeting                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Message from high-up representative of management | <input type="checkbox"/> | Discussion of race relations in your community                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Report on plans of employer to outsource jobs     |                          |   |

<sup>3</sup> as defined by members of the Iowa State Labor Press Association, 1996.

## How do you get stories or articles? What kind of stories are appropriate? Who will write them?

Every newsletter has a policy on what goes in and what doesn't. But often that policy is not clearly expressed or even clearly understood. It can save you much grief if you do express this policy for all readers. Nancy Brigham and Maria Catalfo, authors of the essential *How to do Leaflets, Newsletter & Newspapers*, suggest wording for an editorial policy:

*"While we welcome your contributions, we ask that they be constructive. All articles should contribute positively to the welfare of this union and its members, and we will accept no attacks on any union leader or member. We will accept a thoughtful discussion of all related issues in the letters column, and reserve the right to reply to those that seem to reflect a misunderstanding of the union and its policies."<sup>4</sup>*

### Think of your newsletter as consisting of two fundamental elements, aside from graphics and photos.

1. **Notices and lists (of meetings, events, officers, etc.)**  
Lists and notices are easy to get and easy to print.
2. **Articles (regardless of length--paragraphs describing or informing).**  
These are not so easy to come up with. Here are some ways to do it.

### Getting articles--some ideas

#### 1. Let the members speak

Your newsletter can and should function as the voice of the people--helping to counteract the all too frequent and usually incorrect image of the local as dominated by a clique. Ask for and welcome contributions by members about conditions at work, thoughts on the local union, politics, human interest with a union aspect. Some ways this might be done:

- **Letters to the editor.** Try to start a "letters" section. If people will contribute, this may become the most popular part of the newsletter. Obviously, applying your editorial policy will be critical to keeping the letters from becoming personal attacks or things which hurt the union. But criticism of policy which is expressed without personalities will usually be a union building exercise.
- **Ask for articles.** Don't just wait for them--they will probably never come. You must ask! Contact individuals who you know have a gift for writing and ask them to submit occasional pieces to the newsletter. You can develop a system of "reporters in the field" covering different departments, or covering politics, grievances, community events, members "doings". Be sure and let them know you will help them get started and that you may have to edit for length.

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<sup>4</sup>) Brigham and Catalfo, *How to do Leaflets, Newsletters & Newspapers*, 1991, p. 22.

- **Interviews.** Who? Average folks about major events; leaders; big shots, members. As editor, you will become always conscious of the next newsletter deadline. You will find your perspective on everything changing to “is this something for the newsletter?” And you should be aware that talking to people at work, at the union meeting, at political and social events is always a way to liven up your newsletter. People are always interested in what other people have to say, and most people love to see their name in print! So get out that notepad and start interviewing!

### **Approaches to the interview--<sup>5</sup>**

✍ **OK to fiddle with quotes.** If you need to change a quote--to make it more on target, to correct errors, etc. always be sure and check with the person you are quoting. Nothing makes you more irritated that to be misquoted. But you are also happy to have an alert editor catch an error and give you a chance to correct it before it appears in print.

✍ **Q&A** One way to get a longer interview in the newsletter is to prepare a series of questions and print them and the answers you get from your interviewee. Or have a couple of questions and lots of members sounding off on the same topic.

✍ **Personal story.** Has a member gone to convention? Participated on a picket line? Worked phone banks in a recent get out the vote effort? Ask them to tell the story in 2 or 3 paragraphs.

✍ **One of several sources.** When you are writing your own story, you can make it more lively and readable by inserting members' views on the issue. If they differ from your own, all the better!

✍ **One-liners and quotable quotes<sup>6</sup>** Always be alert for quotable one-liners, whether you are chatting with people in the workplace or listening to a speech or sermon. Russ Jones, long-time editor of UAW 1237's *Bear Facts* in Burlington, is never without his spiral notepad and will be seen taking copious notes where ever he is. Develop this habit and make your job of spicing up your newsletter much easier.

**2. Rewrites.** Most of us couldn't be editors if we didn't borrow and use material from each other and from our national and international union press. Most of these publications want us to use their articles and encourage us to do so. The Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, for example, regularly distributes clipart and articles to assist the local editor. Many of these articles contain information on national or state political issues which we would find difficult to produce on our own. The articles are usually jam-packed with important facts and are written from a union point of view. Our members need this information!

But the challenge we should take up is how do we get our members to read articles written for a different audience and on issues which may seem at first glance to be distant from the local scene?

**The answer is “rewriting.”** Rewriting is more than editing. We use this term to refer to taking a canned article (for which you have copying permission) and making it exciting, relevant and readable for YOUR members. Some basic principles:

- ➊ **Local focus.** Give the article a local focus or slant. Write up a paragraph which points out how this issue is relevant to your members. A great way to do this is to interview Sally Smith from your local, who can comment on the issue and how it affects her, her family or her department at work. Then you get the double advantage of localizing plus featuring a local person's name in the article.

<sup>5</sup>)Brigham and Catalfio, *How to do Leaflets, Newsletters & Newspapers*, 1991, p. 98

<sup>6</sup>)Brigham and Catalfio, *How to do Leaflets, Newsletters & Newspapers*, 1991, p. 98



- **Length.** See if the canned article can be shortened. If so, don't hesitate to cut, but be sure you keep the main points in!
- **Headline.** Look at the headline. Can it be "jazzed up"? Given a local twist?
- **Pull quotes.** Pick a sentence from the article which is especially "quotable" and put it in a box somewhere in the article. This will draw people into the article as a whole.
- **Placement.** You may have (or create) a special section for political articles. Many newsletters like to have the important political articles as lead articles. Think of having them on a right-hand facing page for special emphasis.
- **Graphics.** Can you find a graphic or cartoon which ties into the article? You might even consider adding a comment under the graphic.

A pull quote will draw people into the article as a whole.

**3. Write your own material.** This is the option that is more frightening to most of us. But it can also become the most personally rewarding part of being the editor. Learning to write well is no more difficult than learning to ride a bicycle or develop your biceps. It just takes repeated practice! Begin with just a paragraph on something you think really should be in the newsletter, but which no one else will write.

## The local union newsletter: What to write about

### *Politics*

- Local, county, state, national.....
- Candidate profiles, voting records, your own interviews with candidates
- Political issues, especially those that most affect your members
- Political processes: how to register to vote, how to participate in your local precinct caucus and county party; how to write resolutions; how to get involved in campaign work
- Party platforms: compare and contrast
- The right wing threat to union values and workplace standards

### *Solidarity*

- What's happening to unions in other industries, other states, other plants in our town
- Solidarity across borders
- Solidarity in the workplace: across shifts, across teams, across departments

### *Stories and pictures of union members at work*

- Take the union into the workplace!
- Build a sense of closeness between what goes on at work and the local union

### *Internal union policy debates and events*

➔ Issues, elections, meetings

➔ "You are the Union"

### ***Contract bargaining***

➔ Membership mobilization around issues

➔ Discussion of proposals

➔ Ratification debate

### ***How the economy works***

➔ CEO salaries compared to workers' wages

➔ Globalization of the labor and capital markets

➔ Technological change as it affects your members

### ***Union finances***

➔ "It's your money!"

### ***Workplace problems and issues***

➔ Fighting discrimination and harassment

➔ Union proposals to management to correct problems

➔ Health and safety hazards in the workplace

➔ How the union is fighting to represent its members within labor-management cooperation programs

**Afraid to start writing your own material?** These tips from R. Flesch may take away the fear factor.

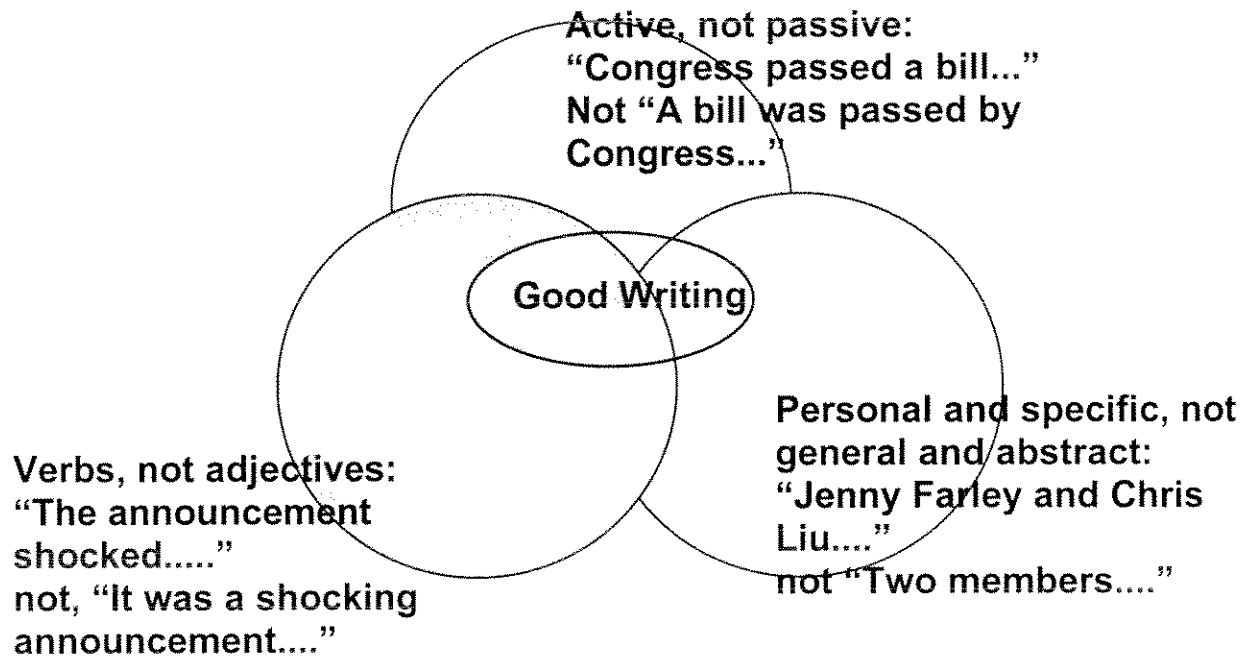
#### **THE 25 RULES OF EFFECTIVE WRITING<sup>7</sup>**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Write about people, things, and facts | 9. Forestall misunderstandings                                      |
| 2. Write as you talk                     | 10. Don't be too brief  |
| 3. Use contractions                      | 11. Plan a beginning, middle, and end                               |
| 4. Use the first person                  | 12. Go from the rule to the exception, from the familiar to the new |
| 5. Quote what was said                   | 13. Use short names and abbreviations                               |
| 6. Quote what was written                | 14. Use pronouns rather than repeating nouns                        |
| 7. Put yourself in the reader's place    |   |
| 8. Don't hurt the reader's feelings      |   |

<sup>7</sup> R. Flesch, *How to Write, Speak and Think More Effectively*.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 15. Use verbs rather than nouns                 | 20. Keep your sentences short                |
| 16. Use the active voice and a personal subject | 21. Keep your paragraphs short               |
| 17. Use small, round figures                    | 22. Use direct questions                     |
| 18. Specify. Use illustrations, cases, examples | 23. Underline for emphasis                   |
| 19. Start a new sentence for each new idea      | 24. Use parentheses for casual mention       |
|   | 25. Make your writing interesting to look at |

### CHECK YOUR WRITING



### CHECKLIST FOR WRITING LEADS

The lead is what draws people into the article--usually the first sentence or two. Look at an article in your own newsletter and evaluate the lead: *if you answer "no" to any of the following questions, you may have to rewrite your lead.*

1. Is it specific (rather than vague or abstract)?
2. Is it concise? (No more than 3 lines typed)
3. Does it begin with the news? (If you began with the time and place it occurred, rewrite it!)
4. Does it emphasize the most interesting and important aspect of the story--the main thing that happened?
5. If it originated in a distant city, did you begin with a dateline?
6. Have you used a relatively simple sentence structure, avoiding a long beginning clause or phrase?
7. Has it been localized?
8. If you used a question, is it short, simple and provocative?
9. If you used a quotation, does it adequately summarize the story?
10. Have you emphasized the story's importance and its impact on your readers?
11. Have you double-checked all facts to be sure they are correct, and not exaggerated or inaccurate?

### WRITING FOR AND ABOUT PEOPLE

Those who study "what works" in writing for the people, tell us that we all like to read about people. "People" magazine's title is based on this recognition. In our own writing, we need to include more personal references. This test will give you an idea of what we mean.

#### WRITING FOR AND ABOUT PEOPLE: TEST YOUR WRITING\*<sup>8</sup>

Count off a randomly selected 100-word sample of your own original writing.

Give yourself one point for each time you use:

*Personal References:*

- > Personal name.
- > Personal pronoun.
- > Concrete nouns which refer to human beings. ("workers" "members" "people"

#### Human Interest Scale

(Number of personal references per 100 words)

Points	Human Interest Level of Prose
19+ .....	Very easy
14 to 18 .....	Easy
10 to 13 .....	Fairly easy
6 to 9 .....	Standard
4 to 5 .....	Fairly Difficult
3 .....	Difficult
0 to 2 .....	Very difficult

#### **READABILITY: TEST YOUR PROSE\***

Count off several randomly selected 100-word samples of your own original prose.

<sup>8</sup> R. Flesch *How to Write, Speak and Think More Effectively*

Go through the text, counting the incidence of the formats below. Give yourself one point for each time you use:

*Formats:*

- > Any word with a capital letter.
- > Any word underlined or italicized.
- > All numbers not spelled out.
- > All punctuation marks except commas and hyphens and periods after abbreviations (as in "etc.").
- > All other symbols such as \$, %, #, &, @, \*, +.
- > Beginning of a paragraph.
- > Ending of a paragraph.

Readability Chart

Points	Readability Level of Prose
Up to 20 .....	Formal
21 to 25 .....	Informal
26 to 30 .....	Fairly popular
31 to 35 .....	Popular
Over 35 .....	Very popular!

\* R. Flesch *How to Write, Speak and Think More Effectively*

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# GETTING PEOPLE TO READ YOUR NEWSLETTER: Easy tips for layout and design

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“Layout is getting material into your publication in some semblance of order that hopefully looks good. There’s one hard and fast rule: it always takes longer than expected.”<sup>9</sup>

Basic principles of layout include:

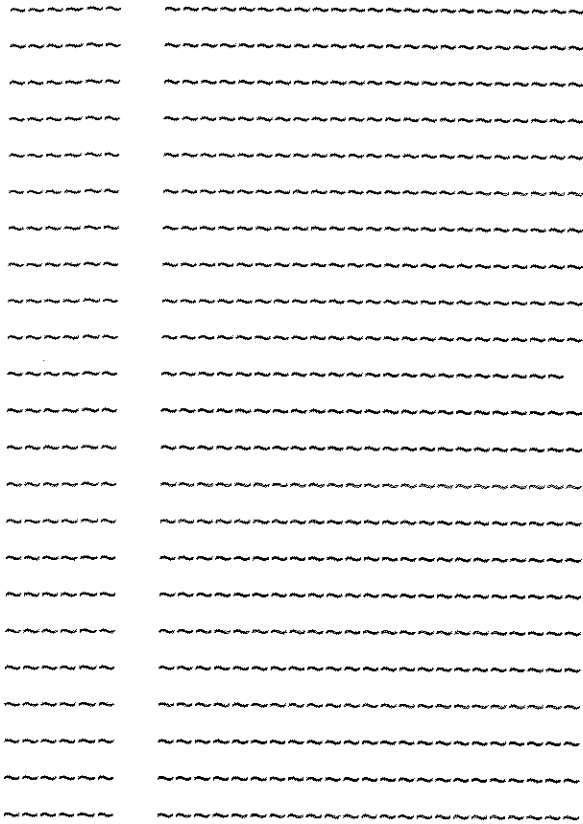
- Most important story or stories first or in key locations  
“key locations” -- front page, back page, inside centerfold, first right-hand inside page. “Top of the fold” is more important than under the fold.
- Same recurring information in same location every issue
- Banner and masthead on front page, usually at the top
- Articles in clear shapes on each page
- Typed material in columns
- Same column style through-out
- Columns narrow enough to read quickly
- Boxes should line up with the sides of the typed column

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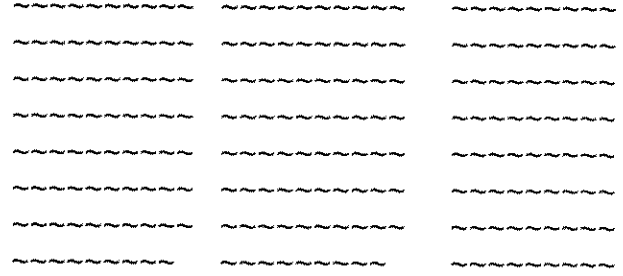
<sup>9</sup> Borrowed and adapted from CWA Local Editors' Handbook.

- **Internal bold headings to break up long articles**
- **White space--use it generously**
- **Graphics: large, bold, surrounded by white space**
- **Headlines: ditto!**
- **Balance: use strong diagonals**
- **Don't use more than two different fonts (type faces or styles)**
- **Every photo has a caption: short, relevant**
- **One large photo better than several small (exception: photo essays which take up an entire page--union picnic, for example)**

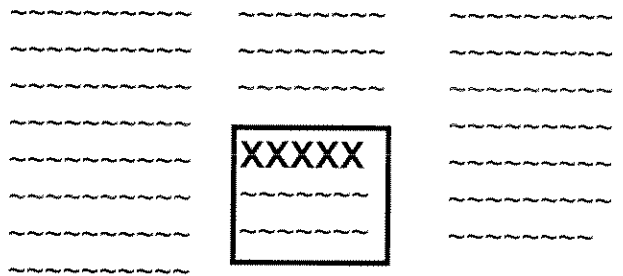
**THE DANGER OF TOO MUCH TEXT.  
COLUMN TOO WIDE**



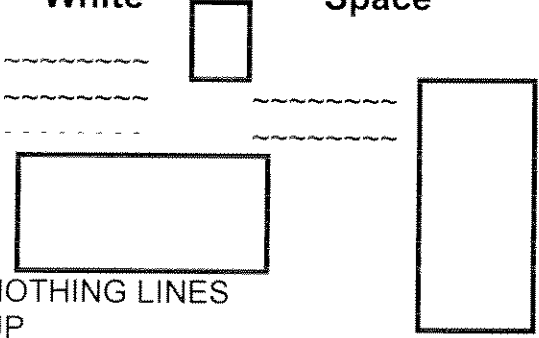
**White space  
looks planned**



**Everything lines up**



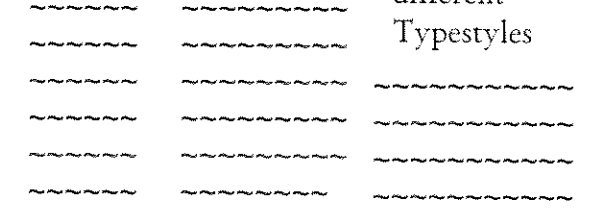
**Bad Use of  
White Space**



**NOTHING LINES  
UP**

**TOO MANY BOXES;  
NO STRONG  
DIAGONAL**

**HEADLINES BUTT UP** Too many  
different  
Typestyles



**Not enough white  
space**



Caption too small

Uneven margins



# HOW BREAKING UP YOUR COPY MAKES IT EASIER TO READ

~~~~~  
~~~~~  
XXXXX~

~~~~~  
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XXXX~

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XXXXX~

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XXX~

## Boxes help.....

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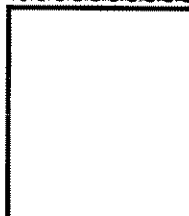


**Photo and headline relate to each other**

~~~~~  
~~~~~  
XXXXX

~~~~~  
~~~~~  
XXXXX

~~~~~  
~~~~~  
**Strong diagonal**



## Lower case headlines, Arial font, as big and bold as you like!

Times New Roman for text, in 10 point. The "serifs" make it, and other fonts like it, easier to read.

### **Internal headlines.**

These can be sans serif in a font such as Arial.

### **To use italics, or not to use italics**

You should regard italics -- even in the same font -- as a different font. Use sparingly if at all.



Margin:  
.5 inch  
on all  
sides

3 columns,  
with .3 inch  
space  
between.

# **Your mast-head: The name of your newsletter.**

In smaller type, the date, volume (year) and number of this particular issue ("Volume II, Number 3" means the second year of publication, and the third issue put out this year.) The name, address and phone number of the local should also go here.

Margin to margin:  
never more  
than 2" high.

**Photo or graphic**

**Standard  
feature here  
every issue**

For example: grievance  
report / time and place  
of next  
meeting.

**Lead article**

~~~~~

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~~~~~

No more than one-  
half to two-thirds of  
type per page!  
Save space for  
graphics, headlines  
and white space.



**Caption**

No photo  
without a  
caption!